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INFORMATION CIRCULAR

To: Members of the staff

From: Director of Personnel

Subject: SECRETARY-GENERAL'S STATEMENT TO THE FIFTH COMMITTEE

Following is the text of the statement made by the Secretary-General on personnel questions in the Fifth Committee:

"It is with a keen sense of the responsibilities incumbent upon me that I address you today. I have come before you to speak about the heart and soul of our Organization, namely, the men and women of all origins who have entered its service.

"Before going into the substance of my topic, I wish first to pay a heartfelt tribute to the staff of the United Nations wherever they may be serving. I am well aware that in many cases they are working in conditions of hardship and even physical danger. The women and men in the field, those assigned to the different United Nations offices around the world, or those serving at Headquarters in New York, are all part of a civil service which is not only competent but also dedicated and dynamic. To the contemporary world which is faced with so many challenges, they represent a true source of wealth and perhaps its greatest asset. Everyone knows how conscious I am of the magnitude of their responsibilities, which is at the same time the measure of their worth.

"The merits of our staff are all the greater in that the task of the world Organization, owing precisely to its universal character, is anything but simple. And this task is constantly growing in complexity in these times in which we are living. It will become even more complex in the years ahead.

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"Having said this, we must admit that, under the pressure of circumstances, the Organization has been operating in slow motion; routine has set in.

"A breath of fresh air is needed to restore lost momentum. The international upheavals occurring today provide an auspicious opportunity - an opportunity which future generations will reproach us for missing. Today the United Nations is vital to the building of peace throughout the world. Demands are being made on the Organization from many quarters. And by the force of events, a new dynamic is emerging before our very eyes, one which requires a new spirit within the Secretariat, in the ordinary activities of all its staff.

"I have spoken of the sweeping changes on the international scene as the present century draws to a close. These changes have resulted in increased and unprecedented demands on our Organization. On the one hand, the world Organization is faced with problems as never before; on the other, it has unprecedented opportunities for resolving these problems. That is why I said a moment ago that our task, already difficult enough in the past, has become even harder today. I would mention that there are other reasons apart from this main reason. One stems from the growing complexity of the contemporary world, which directly affects the United Nations system through its various agencies. It renders all the more complicated the vital task of coordination! The other stems from the collapse of old ways of thinking, as the world has become a place in which no longer are there any ready-made explanations. And this also complicates our mission because our imagination is constantly beset by challenges. To the physical and functional mobility which so often rules our careers has been added a kind of 'intellectual mobility', which is not likely to make our work any easier.

"I do not want you to think that I wish to go on and on painting a dark picture of the situation. But there is another problem which needs to be mentioned, namely, the growing difficulty which the Organization continues to experience in making ends meet. For a long time now, the growth in the Organization's resources has failed to keep pace with the expansion in its activities. Perennial shortfalls, the continual lack of reserves and constant uncertainty are the daily lot of those who are responsible for managing the Organization's finances. This is not a new problem, but it has become a chronic one. Soon it will be critical. What is more, voluntary contributions for development and humanitarian programmes are declining.

"What is there to say? Simply put, unless the Organization is placed on a sounder financial footing, it may not be able to cope with its new responsibilities. And so once again, on behalf of the United Nations, I solemnly appeal to all Member States to make a commitment to meet their obligations and to pay their contributions first in full, and not in instalments, and then on time, that is, in January and not in December. While these conditions are not sufficient in themselves, they are necessary, absolutely necessary!

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"Reorganizing the Secretariat and preparing it for its new and expanded mandates were high on my list of priorities when I took office at the beginning of this year. The need for change had been recognized by Member States and by the majority of the women and men who work for the Organization. I felt it my duty to make these tasks absolute imperatives. I have endeavoured, as you are certainly aware, to stress this priority from the very beginning of my term of office, and this I have done deliberately. More recently, I again drew attention to this imperative in my annual report and in my statement to the Committee for Programme and Coordination. I also did so a few days ago when I addressed the General Assembly in plenary on the subject of follow-up to the Rio Conference. I am not interested in reform for the sake of reform and I believe there is nothing more pointless than an obsession with organizational charts. My objective, I repeat, is to make the Secretariat, which is truly the nerve-centre of the system, an effective instrument so that it is capable of responding to each and every priority which Member States set for it.

"Once the process has been completed, we will be able to enjoy working in the new light. But first we need a more streamlined structure, with clearer lines of responsibility and a more credible management style. There must be an awareness that the various mandates of the Organization are all part of a greater whole. We must see to it that every staff member serving with an organization, a programme or a specialized fund is linked to all other staff members and has a sense of being united with other staff under the authority of the Secretary-General.

"In the first phase of restructuring, the number of high-level posts was reduced. As a result, the decision-making process was made simpler and more direct.

"When I addressed the General Assembly at the beginning of this week on the subject of reform in the economic, social and environmental sectors, I called for a more integrated vision and a better harmonization of the functions of Headquarters and those of the rest of the system. I do not wish to repeat what I said then on this specific subject, which in any case reflects the overall approach I have just outlined for you; in other words, the twin imperatives of logical organization and harmonious decentralization.

"The aim of the temporary suspension of recruitment to Professional posts which I introduced at the beginning of the year (and as I entered this conference room earlier I heard a delegate say that he favoured an end to the freeze on recruitment) was to take stock of the human resources which the Organization has at its disposal. I wanted to find out what the situation of our human resources was and to put those resources to optimum use by redeploying them to areas which have become priorities in the light of the present international situation. Thus, many of the Organization's staff are now occupying positions of

responsibility in the various parts of the world where the United Nations is present through its peacemaking, peace-keeping, humanitarian, economic cooperation and other missions, in Yugoslavia, Cambodia, South Africa, Somalia, El Salvador, Angola, Tajikistan and Belarus, to name only a few.

"As part of the restructuring process which I intended to launch from the minute I came to the United Nations, the functioning of every part of the Secretariat has been reviewed. This review has taken into account the considerations set out in General Assembly resolution 46/232 of 2 March 1992. The aim has been to eliminate duplication and to expand spheres of competence and responsibility. The submission of the programme-budget proposals for the coming biennium will provide an opportunity for a thorough review of the number of posts and the distribution of staff resources among the various sectors of activity. In the meantime, I have undertaken a review of vacancies in the Professional category. Vacancies will be reviewed in an overall context of personnel, financial and management considerations.

"While maintaining staffing at reasonable levels, I believe that redeployment between the different sectors of activity is an absolute necessity. We must introduce greater flexibility in the Organization's use of its human resources. The proposals which are before you today, as well as the revised estimates for 1992-1993 and the outline of the budget for the next biennium, must be viewed in the light of this imperative. I would add that I intend to make specific proposals on this subject in the budget on which you will be taking a decision next year. The aim of these proposals will be to make more efficient use of the posts placed at my disposal by the General Assembly.

"Structural changes will be successful only if they are accompanied by new ways of thinking and new working methods. Some of these changes are within the purview of the Secretariat. Others can succeed only if Member States show clear political will, for the integrity and independence of United Nations staff also depend on Member States. The conditions of recruitment must ensure that the United Nations will continue to be able in future to attract and retain men and women from all parts of the world who are highly qualified and deeply dedicated, first and foremost to the noble task entrusted to the world Organization. The best traditions of public service must be combined increasingly with modern management practices. This is the duty of all of us who are gathered in this room today.

"I am committed to taking all possible measures to strengthen the international civil service. I would like this to be my legacy to the Organization.

"Of all the tangible and intangible resources available to the Organization, nothing matches the worth of its staff. I owe it to the Member States to ensure that the Organization makes the best selection and the most effective utilization of its staff. I owe it equally to the

staff to ensure that its service to the Organization is duly recognized, properly supported and developed, and justly rewarded.

"I trust that Member States recognize the advantages of a genuinely independent, geographically balanced, international civil service of the highest calibre. I believe that such a Secretariat can provide Member States with the most effective and integrated support.

"My approach to the international civil service is twofold: to preserve its independence and integrity, and to promote the highest standards of efficiency and competence.

"Article 100 of the Charter of the United Nations makes clear that the Secretary-General and the staff are 'international officials responsible only to the Organization'. Thus the term 'international civil service' stands for a professional body of women and men, devoted to the service of the human community.

"In accordance with Article 100, each Member of the United Nations 'undertakes to respect the exclusively international character of the responsibilities of the Secretary-General and the staff and not to seek to influence them in the discharge of their responsibilities'.

"An important component of my concept of an independent international civil service is a clear differentiation between political and career appointments.

"Political appointments at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General levels should, by definition, be of a limited duration. As a rule, they should not extend beyond the term of office of the Secretary-General or the head of programme who made the initial appointment. They may be of shorter duration if changing circumstances require it. Career staff who choose to take up such appointments would automatically forfeit their permanent contractual status. In other words, it would not be possible to move between categories and retain the advantages of both.

"As part of my effort to reduce departmental fragmentation and enhance managerial responsibility at the Director level, I intend to continue decreasing the number of Assistant Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General posts throughout the United Nations. This is relevant to my restructuring of the Department of Administration and Management, where it is essential to introduce an integrated approach to all the interrelated managerial issues, coordinated by the head of the Department.

"A career international civil service should be based on competitive recruitment at the junior professional levels and a transparent career development process in which the majority of posts are filled from within. Rigour in granting and reviewing permanent appointments is an integral part of this concept.

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"I envisage a structure where a young person may enter the Organization, serve in different posts at Headquarters or other duty stations, participate in field missions and undergo periodic training in connection with new assignments. The best of those international civil servants may aspire to the most senior levels in the career structure. For selected high-level managerial responsibilities, I am currently studying the possibility of introducing a career level related to the Assistant Secretary-General level.

"A genuinely independent service also requires an end to the practice of national subsidies paid to some staff members. This practice is unethical. It raises questions of conflict of interest which cannot be ignored. It also masks the real need to rectify compensation levels. I have put on record my belief that such subsidies are totally unacceptable. I ask you to help me eliminate them. The highest standards of integrity should not be compromised, even by implication.

"I will demand that the highest possible standards of conduct be upheld at all times. In particular, I will not tolerate senior officials lobbying Governments to protect or promote vested interests.

"Let me turn now to the second pillar of a strong international civil service - the highest standards of efficiency and competence.

"I intend to put in place a modern personnel management system and work for competitive terms and conditions of service. The quality and motivation of the staff will, in the final analysis, decide the success of the Organization in meeting the new challenges ahead.

"I am gratified by the response of the staff to the new and added duties placed on them in the course of the past year. The number of staff members on peace-keeping missions is unprecedented. Currently, some 600 Professional staff and more than 1,000 General Service staff are assigned to such missions. Many are entering totally new fields, frequently without the support of established structures, and often in difficult conditions. Many are compelled to leave their families behind for long periods. Others have moved into new functions at Headquarters with expanded responsibilities. Their dedication and versatility have been impressive. But we cannot sustain this over the long term without fundamental changes in the present outmoded system of personnel management.

"We all understand the nature of the issues. Sufficient studies and proposals are on the table. I have noted the significant progress made in the Staff-Management Consultative Committee on many of these matters. I express my appreciation to those Member States which have contributed to studies on career development and to those which have offered further assistance. It is now time for action.

"The rapid implementation of a comprehensive career development system is essential. The basic elements of such a system are clear. I have already referred to some of them: primary emphasis on competitive recruitment at entry level, and limiting to a minimum external recruitment at levels above P-3; the improvement of the status of women in the Organization, especially in its higher echelons; an improved performance appraisal system. This must take into account the ability of staff to adapt to new challenges; a transparent promotion system which will reward staff for competence, creativity, versatility and, increasingly, mobility; strong emphasis on an expanded training programme; and measures to ensure that staff at all levels are held accountable for their performance and professional conduct.

"I expect the restructured Department of Administration and Management to put this programme into effect rapidly. I am requesting specific proposals, together with a timetable, with a view to putting all elements in place as soon as possible. There is a need for a new attitude towards personnel management reflected in a positive service orientation and simplified procedures.

"I attach particular priority to training. Training is crucial to enhance the quality of management in the house and to provide staff with operational skills needed for field service. There is a strong link between effective leadership and management, and high staff morale, productivity and career satisfaction. The United Nations is currently devoting only 0.27 per cent of its staff costs to training. I will propose a significantly increased allocation of resources to this activity in the next budget. I ask that you support this essential element of a comprehensive personnel policy. In the context of overall financial restraint, training should be seen as a critical investment for the future success of the institution.

"Finally, I repeat that a comprehensive personnel policy must provide equality of opportunity. All qualified staff should be able to make full use of their skills in the service of the Organization. It is a cause for pride that the Charter states explicitly: 'The United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs.'

"It is not cause for pride, however, that, with respect to women, the facts reveal a reality far less than ideal. It may well be that the most far-reaching revolution among the vast social transformations of our time is the large-scale emergence of women in all professions, including public and governmental affairs. It is evident that efforts to improve the status of women in the Secretariat in recent years have not reached anticipated levels. This is not only a matter of equity. The world can no longer afford to deprive its public life of the talents of half of all humanity. There are, of course, complicated issues involved. Entry-level recruitment shows excellent results, but this cannot remedy

the shortage of women in managerial posts or of female candidates at the political level. For my part, I intend to do all I can to bring the balance in policy-level positions as close to 50-50 as possible by the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations.

"Competitive conditions of service are central to maintaining a Secretariat with the highest standards of efficiency and competence. I draw your attention to the statement before you from the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) - a body to which I attach the greatest importance. Last month I met with my colleagues. We discussed ways in which the common system could best implement today's increasingly diverse and complex mandates. There was a consensus. The pace and extent of the new demands represent a challenge to which all are rising to the best of their ability. But those demands are straining the human and financial resources of the Organization to the limit. Many organizations find it difficult to recruit or retain qualified staff at present levels of salaries and allowances. I should note here that other international employers, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), offer much more attractive remuneration levels.

"In its statement to the General Assembly, ACC has highlighted that the conditions of the Professional and higher categories of staff are not competitive and that action is needed now. I am convinced that this is the case.

"I also share the staff's concern that conditions of service for General Service should not deteriorate. I draw these issues to your attention as a matter of urgency. I ask you to support the carefully considered proposals of the executive heads of the system. Decisions on these issues are linked to the creation of a strong, independent international civil service.

"The security and safety of United Nations personnel are of greatest concern to me. When United Nations staff are deployed in conditions of strife, whether for preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace-keeping, peace-building or humanitarian purposes, their safety must be a foremost consideration.

"These men and women deserve to be respected and rewarded for the hazards they endure. I shall do my utmost to ensure that these dedicated staff members are not exposed to unnecessary risks, and will continue to consult with the staff regularly on security and safety matters.

"The staff also deserves every measure of security that Member States can muster. Three important considerations should be recognized in this regard: First, some staff are illegally intimidated, abused or detained. Member States should respect and strictly enforce the international legal instruments and undertakings which are meant to protect United Nations staff in the performance of their functions.

"Secondly, Member States should be prudent and responsible when calling for increased United Nations involvement. I cannot in good conscience, or in fulfilment of the trust placed in me, permit our people to take on responsibilities which outrun the resources made available to enable the task to be done within a context of acceptable security.

"And thirdly, I have recommended that the Security Council gravely consider what action should be taken towards those who put United Nations personnel in danger or cause their death - including collective measures agreed in advance to come into effect should the purpose and personnel of a United Nations mission systematically be in danger and hostilities occur. By law, by prudence and by deterrence, it is possible to improve the safety and security of United Nations personnel.

"As Secretary-General, and as the Chief Administrative Officer of the Organization, there are standards which I impose upon myself in addition to the goals I have outlined. They may be termed delegation, consultation and accountability.

"My management policy has been, and will continue to be, to delegate. I expect managers to manage and all staff to work creatively, constructively and with a commitment to disciplined achievement. I hope to see a shared sense of participation and responsibility all up and down the line. In close connection to this must be a new sense of the integral character of the many dimensions of the role of the United Nations. Economic, social, humanitarian, developmental and environmental functions must be on a par with the Organization's more traditional focus on issues of international peace and security. The task of creating a better world has no separate or secondary aspects. On all these issues I attach high importance to exchanges of views with Member States and, on matters within the Secretariat, with the staff/management consultative mechanisms.

"There are great things to be done as we approach our fiftieth anniversary. Restructuring and reform must be an ongoing process. I am committed to continuing my efforts throughout my term of office. We are well launched on this journey, and I pledge to you that I will do my utmost to give a new dimension to our Organization and a new reality to the spirit of our Charter."